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ABSTRACT

To develop a rationale for the implementation of a field-based program for teacher education in reading and language arts is the purpose of this paper. The field-based program is discussed in terms of its evolution from the traditional university program, the interrelationship between the competency-based and field-based programs, and a possible model for implementation of a field-based program. The attempts being made at the University of North Florida to implement a field-based program are discussed in detail with special emphasis on the reading-language arts program. Numerous obstacles that must be overcome to develop a successful field-based program are discussed, the primary one being the inability to supervise field experiences adequately. (WR)

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Field-Based Teacher Education in Reading and Language Arts

The concept of field based teaching is one that has been discussed with increasing interest in recent years. Educators have long argued that in order to develop competent and successful teachers, a greater effort must be made to acquaint those students involved in pre-service training with actual classroom situations at an earlier point in their training. However, for economic reasons or lack of cooperation between the school systems and the universities, this concept remained only a topic for intellectual discussion in many universities with implementation of such a program being limited to a small number of institutions of higher learning. In recent years though, there has been a greater effort on the part of educators to begin to move toward implementation of limited field based programs.

Initially field based programs consisted of attempts to get students into the school in an earlier stage of their pre-service development by using a type of pre-internship designed to allow the student to gain some experience before the actual period of internship. It was soon realized by many teacher educators that this was not a sufficient amount of time in the classroom

for the future teacher to acquire those competencies which are imperative for successful teaching after graduation.

As realization of this dilemma became more widespread there were those in education who wanted to build in more field experiences for students involved in pre-service training. This resulted in a trend toward programs emphasizing more field experiences in the undergraduate curricula. Some universities have instituted a commitment to a total field-based program at the pre-service level, which leads to the primary thrust of this article; a discussion of field-based programs in Reading and Language Arts.

Of special concern to those of use in the IRA is the development of field-based programs in the areas of Reading and Language Arts. There have been some interesting developments in these areas in recent years. These are areas where a great deal of emphasis is placed in the elementary schools by teachers, administrators, and parents, therefore, it is essential that quality instruction be provided to these schools in the form of well-trained and highly competent teachers. In order to achieve these goals, a greater effort must

be placed on enabling students in pre-service programs to demonstrate specific competencies that have been selected as necessary for quality teaching. As stated previously, a few universities have begun to move in this direction.

A logical question we might ask at this point is what is a field-based program and how does it operate. The basic idea of a field-based program is that it enables the student in a pre-service program to gain access to the classroom earlier in his program. First of all competencies needed for successful teaching in each area such as Reading and Language Arts are listed. These competencies may be presented in such written formats as objectives in modules which emphasize an individualized approach to developing competencies. Hopefully the student acquires a working knowledge of the specified competencies in the university situation through the enabling activities which may be provided in the modules. This introduction helps the student to acquire a basic understanding of the competencies prior to demonstrating them in peer-group situations. The next step in the process is the actual involvement of the student in teaching Reading or Language Arts to individual children,

small groups of children or even some limited large group instruction. Ideally, students given an earlier opportunity to observe and work in an actual classroom setting should develop more quickly those desired competencies that exude good teaching and hopefully develop into more able classroom teachers.

The experiences gained in a field-based teacher education program should enable a graduate of a field-based program to be more effective in the classroom, exude more confidence in himself, have a better understanding of children and child development principles, and perform with greater competency in a classroom situation than a student who has had little or no exposure to the "real world" of the classroom.

In order to initiate a field-based program, there must be a commitment on the part of the university to competency based education. As I see it, these go hand-in-hand with field-based programs evolving from competencies that have been specified in the areas of Reading and Language Arts. Competency-based education should then be considered as a prerequisite to the development of a field-based program with specific competencies being selected as the desirable outcomes for the pre-service

program to strive to develop within the student. The field-based part of the program serves as the evaluation or measurement stage with the student expected to demonstrate in the field these competencies acquired in the university classroom. It would seem that a logical extension of this process would be the development of more competent teachers who could provide a higher quality of instruction which meets the individual needs of each child.

In an effort to relate this above criteria to Reading and Language Arts, the development of a specific competency in Reading will be presented and followed through to its logical conclusion. The competency to be used will be stated in behavioral terms and developed along the lines of the model presented in the preceding paragraphs.

Given a one hour classroom session composed of a lecture presentation, a demonstration, and a role playing experience relating to the language experience approach in teaching reading, all of the students will be able to utilize the language experience approach with a group of 5 to 8 students when observed by the university professor.

As explained in the model presented earlier, the basic competencies are taught in the college classroom by the teacher-educator, demonstrated in peer-group

situations by each student and then hopefully the student will be able to transfer his college classroom and peer-group experiences into an actual classroom situation where he actually teaches reading to a small group of children by using the language experience approach.

An improvement in this approach would of course be the opportunity to demonstrate the desired competencies expected of the student by the university professor with children in an actual classroom setting. When this opportunity does present itself, it should be included as an important segment of the model already presented.

At the University of North Florida, an attempt is being made to initiate a field-based teacher education program built around four procedures for implementing this concept. More specifically, the four procedures of implementing are: (1) block courses, (2) field experiences, (3) Practicum I and (4) Practicum II. These procedures will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Block courses are those courses which are taught as a unit utilizing team teaching among those professors involved in the block. These courses are taught in elementary schools designated for use by the local

school system. Three courses, each carrying five quarter hours of credit, constitute a block with approximately twenty-five students majoring in elementary education participating in the block.

A second procedure used in implementing the field-based program revolves around the idea of field experiences. These field experiences are an integral part of every course offered in the elementary education program with each student required to spend a minimum of one hour per week per five hour course in an elementary school. The primary weakness of this method is the inadequate supervision of students due to lack of staff and the inability of the university to designate specific sites as teaching centers for student participation.

The third procedure is the use of a five-hour course referred to as Practicum I. This is a type of pre-internship with the student required to spend eight hours per week in an elementary school under the supervision of a classroom teacher and professor from the university. Certain competencies are specified in the course module as desirable for the student to learn. Whether or not the student has acquired these competencies at the end of the quarter is determined by the classroom teacher and the university professor. It is desirable that the student take Practicum I during

the junior year, preferably in the third quarter of residence at the university.

Last, but certainly not least in this field-based program, is the course referred to as Practicum II or more commonly called student teaching. This course carries fifteen quarter hours credit and requires full time participation by the student in a classroom setting. It is expected that the student teacher will demonstrate, through a high level of performance, the acquisition of those competenceis which had been stressed throughout the pre-service program. The successful acquisition of these competencies by the student will be determined by the classroom teacher and the college supervisor.

The purpose of this paper was to develop a rationale for the implementation of a field-based program. To provide this information, the field-based program was discussed in terms of its evolution from the traditional university program, the interrelationship between the competency-based and field-based programs, and a possible model for implementation of a field-based program. The attempts being made by the University of North Florida to implement a field-based program have been discussed in great detail with special emphasis on the Reading-Language Arts program. There are of course numerous

obstacles that must be overcome to develop a successful field-based program, the primary one being the inability to supervise field experiences adequately; however, the attempt to implement such a program is being made and it is important to remember that the underlying principle of field-based pre-service teacher education programs is to develop more competent teachers through more classroom exposure.